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SAMUEL ABBOTT GREEN, M.D.,

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THE FIRST SABBATH SCHOOL
IN DEDHAM.
HISTORICAL SKETCH,

DELIVERED BEFORE THE
FIRST CONGREGATIONAL SABBATH SCHOOL

AT

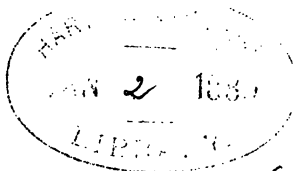
THE 250TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE GATHERING OF
THE FIRST CHURCH IN DEDHAM,
NOVEMBER 18, 1888.

BY DEACON CALVIN GUILD,
ONE OF THE ORIGINAL MEMBERS OF THE FIRST SCHOOL.

C'
DEDHAM, MASS.:
FOR PRIVATE CIRCULATION.
1888.

~~III. #737~~

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Dr. J. A. Green.

*"Suffer little children to come unto Me and forbid them
not, for of such is the Kingdom of Heaven."*

HISTORICAL SKETCH.

We read in the Bible, that Joshua took twelve stones out of the midst of Jordan, and of them set up a monument in Gilgal, saying to the children of Israel, "When your children shall ask their fathers in time to come, saying, What mean these stones? Then ye shall let your children know, saying, Israel came over this Jordan on dry land. For the Lord your God dried up the waters of Jordan from before you, until ye were passed over."

It seems fitting that in the services of to-day and to-morrow, a memorial shall be left for the benefit of future generations; and that in these memorial services, a large share shall be devoted to a rehearsal of what has been done for the moral and spiritual welfare of the children and youth of our Sabbath school.

For the assurance that a great change has been wrought, we have only to contrast their condition before and since the inauguration of the Sabbath school.

Previous to the Sabbath school, very little thought seems to have been given to the subject. As is found in every community, many of the children had no religious culture whatever in their homes, and were often left to grow up in ignorance of the simplest doctrines of the Bible. Year after year and generation after generation the same routine was followed in their home training.

Only children of about fifteen years of age, or older, were considered capable of understanding the meaning of what was learned in their homes or elsewhere.

Their studies were limited to memorizing a few verses of the Bible, one of Watts' psalms or hymns, and the answer to a question from the "Assembly's Shorter Catechism."

Twice a Sabbath, they were required to attend church, sitting on plain board seats, with no fire to warm the house even in the coldest weather, and listen, forenoon and afternoon, to strong doctrinal sermons of an hour or an hour and a half long; then, returning to their homes, although already weary, pass the remainder of the day in

committing to memory the Bible verses, one of Watts' psalms or hymns, and the catechism.

The Lord's Supper was administered once in six weeks. The Preparatory Lecture was preached on the preceding Thursday. On those occasions the studies in the district school were omitted, and the scholars marched two and two, led by the teacher, from the school house to the meeting house to attend the services; and the morning after the communion, the pastor came into the school and, for a brief hour, talked with the children or asked questions in the catechism. Also, semi-annually, the usual studies for a half day were omitted and the time given to the recitation of the catechism. Small pamphlets, with marbled paper covers, were given for the most perfect recitations. Dr. Bates, the pastor, was eminently the children's friend, and his influence was good.

About the year 1815, some of the mothers in the church became very desirous that the children should receive a better religious education, and, encouraged by the success of the experiment in some other places, resolved to organize a Sab-

bath school in connection with the church. With the advice and help of Dr. Bates such a school was organized.

On a lovely Sabbath morning in May, 1816, quite a number of children, under the age of ten or twelve years, were seen hastening along, with Testament and catechism in hand, to the old brick school-house, which stood on nearly the same ground the Unitarian vestry now occupies.

They were welcomed to their new home by kind ladies. There were probably enough scholars for three or four classes. The officers and teachers of the new school were all ladies. Mrs. Tracy, the mother of Mrs. Judge Metcalf, was the first Directress, and Miss Rebecca Damon was the second. Of the teachers, four are now remembered: Mrs. Martha Barry, Miss Sweet, Miss Maria Dixon, and Miss Rebecca Damon.

The school was opened by prayer by the officiating clergyman, or a prayer read by the Directress. The exercises of the hour were chiefly recitations from the Testament and hymn-book, without explanation, but with some kind words

from the teacher. Small paper cards were given as reward for good behavior.

A code of rules was adopted and printed on slips of paper, and given to each scholar, of which the following is a copy, viz :

1. The children are to attend school punctually at the first ringing of the church bell in the morning, with face and hands clean, hair combed and clothes clean.

2. To take their seats (after making their courtesies and bows, which are by no means to be omitted), and not to leave their seats, except by special permission of their teachers.

3. To be perfectly silent in school, and to be attentive to their books, and never fail to bring a Bible or Testament, the Sunday school catechism and Watts' divine hymns.

4. On all occasions to speak the truth.

5. To be kind to all men, also to animals.

6. To avoid bad company.

7. To be respectful and attentive to their teachers.

8. To use no bad words or call names.

9. To come to and go from church orderly.
10. To never mock lame or deformed persons.
11. To behave with solemnity in places of public worship.
12. To be obedient at home to parents and friends.
13. To avoid quarrelling.
14. To go out class after class, as regulated by the teaching Directress, all making bows and courtesies.
15. To read the rules over every Sabbath morning before leaving home.

The school was without question-books or library. Books suitable to children of their age were limited to "Little Henry and His Bearer," "The Life and Happy Death of Mary Ann Clapp," and a very few biographies of children.

At the close of the school the classes were led by their teachers from the school to the meeting-house.

After the end of two years from the organization of the school, the church and society were separated, and the school divided—a part of

the school remaining in the school-house, and a part, by invitation of the Episcopal church, occupying the basement of their church building which stood on Franklin Square.

After the new meeting-house of this society was ready for occupation, the gallery pews were occupied by the Sabbath school. Then a change was made in the management of the school. Men as well as women were appointed as officers and teachers. Of the teachers in the school, while it held its sessions in the gallery, twenty-three are remembered, viz: Henry Winchester, Miranda Guild, M. A. Sturtevant, Rebecca Guild, Sarah Mann, Wm. Symes, Jesse Daniell, Minerva Wheaton, Martha Burgess, Lucinda Bonfils, Louisa Damon, J. Myers, Joseph Morrell, Lendamine D. Guild, Caroline Whiting, Jesse Wheaton, Hannah DeWolf, Rebecca Alden, Miss Fuller, three Misses Newell, and Calvin Guild. Of these, only four are known to be living, viz: Lendamine D. Guild, Caroline Whiting, Rebecca Guild, Calvin Guild. Scholars without regard to age were found in the school.

No question-books were yet used. The Bible was the principal book used. A system of rewards for the encouragement of scholars was adopted. For a certain number of verses learned, a small printed paper reward of merit was given. Ten such merits, when received, were exchanged for a large one, and when ten of these were received, they were exchanged for a small book. This system of rewards awakened an earnest ambition to commit to memory large portions of the Bible, sometimes as many as sixty, eighty, or one hundred verses for one Sabbath.* Such scholars have derived a much greater benefit in later life, from the Word hid away in their hearts, than they can derive from *reading* a few answers prepared for them in the question-book.

In 1835, a small hymn-book for the use of Sabbath schools was published and adopted by the school in exchange for the old Watts' Psalms and Hymns. Question-books were published and introduced. After some years of study from a

* The author never learned more than eighty verses for one recitation.

variety of question-books, the new Quarterly was introduced, and has been used with much success. In 1845, a book of hymns set to music, adapted to the use of the school, was adopted.

After occupying the gallery for some months, the sessions of the school were transferred to the new chapel, generously given by Dr. Burgess for the use of this church and society. In this new home the school rapidly increased in numbers and religious interest. In 1858 or 1859, the school first had the use of an instrument to lead the singing. Mr. Charles J. Capen kindly volunteered his services as leader of the singing with the piano. Under his care the singing was much improved.

The library, at first limited to a very few small books for children, was increased by hundreds of volumes prepared almost expressly for Sabbath schools.

Soon after the installation of Rev. Mr. Edwards, the walls of the chapel were decorated with several handsome tin shields, which were painted and lettered with Bible mottoes. One

shield was painted a pure white, on which was the motto, "She hath done what she could." It was a memorial to Miss Roxanna Alden, who, in her last will, bequeathed the money with which the shields were bought.

Not until about 1827 was any one admitted to the church under the age of seventeen years. Since that date it has been learned by parents and church committees that children of eight, ten, or twelve years of age can and do understand what it is to love Christ as an *atoning, interceding Saviour*; that many can and do, by the grace of God, honor their Saviour by well ordered lives and conversation.

In all these last years, scholars have been consecrating their lives to the Master and growing up to become wise and faithful teachers; they, in their turn, have led many of their scholars, children and adults, to Christ.

To-day, O how many from our school are wearing the golden crown, in mansions prepared for the good and faithful servants.





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